

News Details - Municipal Officials Take Local Natural Gas Concerns to Albany

Representatives of the Tompkins County Council of Governments (TCCOG) voiced local concerns about the issue of natural gas drilling in the Marcellus shale, as they met with staff from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the Governor's Office, and New York State Senate last week in Albany. Attending the meetings were Caroline Town Supervisor and TCCOG chair Don Barber; Tompkins County Legislators Martha Roberson and Pam Mackesey; and Ken Zeserson, Chair of the Ulysses Town Planning Board.

Meeting with Bradley Field, director of the DEC's Division of Mineral Resources (DMR), Kathleen Sanford, assistant director, DMR, and Liz Gordon, special counsel with the DEC, the officials delivered hard copies of the transcript and hand-written comments from last month's Ithaca hearing on gas drilling sponsored by TCCOG, as well as the resolutions passed by the County, TCCOG, and the County's Strategic Tourism Planning Board.

TCCOG representatives highlighted the points made in the resolutions and urged that any permitting be postponed until the federal Environmental Protection Agency study on the risks of hydrofracking is completed; until the DEC has investigated 270 documented incidents related to conventional drilling in the state and cleaned up any sites that need it; and has reviewed and improved existing drilling regulations. The officials also urged that, before issuing permits, the DEC analyze life-cycle emissions of natural gas, which they suggest may not truly be a "cleaner" fuel than coal when emissions related to extraction are considered.

The TCCOG delegation also met with Peter Iwanowicz, acting secretary for the environment in Governor Paterson's office, who requested additional information regarding potential effects of the horizontal drilling on greenhouse gas emissions, and with staff from Senator Eric Schneiderman's office and the Senate Environmental Conservation Committee. The Senate staff also had questions about the carbon footprint of gas versus coal; projected increases in truck traffic from gas drilling; and lack of local control and input into the siting and conditions of drilling operations.

"We appreciate the opportunity these officials gave us to meet with them about this important issue and thank them to listening to the concerns we raised, on behalf of citizens throughout this area," says Legislator Robertson. "Our group also has been working with Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton, who is in the process of setting up meetings in January with chairs of several Assembly committees to discuss the gas drilling issue."

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